Executive Summary

> *"Responsibility is one-third teachers, one-third the parents, and one-third the students. You have got to have those three work with each other".*
> --Arizona teacher.

The School Safety Study resulted from one of the recommendations put forward by the Safety Answers for Education (SAFE) Commission in 2000. The Research and Policy Division (R&P), Arizona Department of Education, has completed Phase I of the study on School Safety, and the purpose of this report is to present the findings of the study.

This report summarizes findings from the interview and survey components of the study. The survey component highlights safety-related policy information across 300 schools. The interview component highlights school safety perceptions of 64 staff across 16 schools, and provides numerous candid and insightful quotes on school safety issues from teachers, principals, counselors, and school resource officers, amongst others.

School safety is a very complex issue. In order to address school safety it is critical to understand the context in which schools reside. Schools face several challenges internal to the school system with respect to school safety, like conflicts between students and student discipline. However, there are many external community influences that also impact school safety, such as crime or gang activities in the community and physical abuse or parental apathy at home. These external factors originate outside of the school but penetrate school environments via students. In this context, schools can effectively *react* to unsafe behaviors on the school premises, but are limited in their ability to *prevent* community factors from threatening school safety.

It becomes clear from the 300 surveys that schools have various programs and policies in place to respond to internal and some of the external threats to school safety.

Physical Threats
✓ In order to monitor access to schools, almost all schools (98%) require visitor sign-ins, 76% of the schools close the campus for most students during lunch, and almost 50% of the schools control access to classrooms and school buildings during school hours and post trespassing laws on school premises.

Discipline
✓ Almost all schools (97%) provide their students and parents with printed codes of conduct to increase awareness pertaining to discipline. About 90% of the schools have zero tolerance policies pertaining to violence, fighting, weapons, firearms, and substance abuse. More than 70% of the schools provide teachers with training on classroom management in order to provide them with skills to control student behavior.

Education
✓ Schools also educate students and staff on ways of preventing or avoiding unsafe situations within the school. More than 90% of the schools educate students in prevention, and more than 80% of the schools partake in behavior modification

intervention for students. Almost 30% of schools train teachers to recognize early warning signs of potentially violent students.

The challenge that schools face appears when community influences diverge from the school's efforts on safety.

The 64 one-on-one interviews provide significant insight into some of the more subtle factors that affect school safety. Respondents share concerns regarding their inability to prevent the influence of community factors on school safety. Following are some examples.

- The relationship between domestic abuse and negative family reinforcements and subsequent student bullying, harassment, and intimidation is highlighted by 33% of the respondents.

    According to a principal "*I personally believe that if the student's experience in their past has been one where they possibly would have been bullied, threatened, intimidated, either within their family or their home, then that's just going to come with them. I think that transcends genders, races, and economic backgrounds*".

- The effect of parental attitudes, such as apathy, on student attitudes and subsequent student behavior is pointed out by 72% of the respondents.

    In the words of a teacher "*I have personally interacted with a large number of parents and they ask why would you want to do better than I've done? What makes you think that you can do better than I did? And when you have that kind of a pervasive feeling it's hard to work with those kids. So our changes have to come within our classrooms. They have to come from within our hearts...*".

- 59% of the respondents point out the negative impact of community crime, such as homicide, on student violence.

    In the words of a teacher "*…the father ran down the hall shot the mother and shot himself and the kid was in the room right there and saw him. I've seen what it's done to the kid, it just destroys a kid*".

Although schools face significant challenges from community influences that negatively impact school safety, they do recognize that there is more that they can do.

➢ Many of the interview respondents (89%) express a need for educating students in conflict resolution and peer mediation in order to equip them with the skills to settle conflicts peacefully.

    In the words of a principal "*I would say there are some perceptions that the climate needs to improve in terms of dealing with conflict resolution. Our kids have a hard time resolving conflicts through verbal means, so there are other means that they choose to do that with, and that is an issue in general*".

➢ 50% of the respondents perceive a need for better collaboration with agencies like law enforcement, Child Protective Services, and health services in order to provide students with protective services when the need arises and also for ongoing prevention efforts.

According to a principal "*I would like to see a situation where, especially in isolated areas, we can combine medical and social services and all of those kind of things. All within the district in one area where the community is able to get that kind of help. And then I think you'd be able to have a much more united impact in working with a lot of the problems that are out there*".

- 90% of the respondents voice the need for increasing communication, enforcing discipline consistently, and leadership at various staff levels in order to promote continued discipline efforts across schools.

According to a principal "*the key is not only having your rules and regulations written out. The real key is consistent and fair enforcement for all kids. You need the support of your upper-level administrators at the district office and your school boards, you need cooperation of the various agencies in your community, with the police and with your court system, and the support of your community. Then you're going to be successful*".

Schools can be successful in promoting safety only by fully understanding what is under their control and what is not within their complete range of control, such as the influence of community on school safety. This is not always easy given the complexity of school safety. However, once schools make this distinction, they are equipped with information they can use to make inroads into communities and collaborate with them.

Phase I constitutes one half of the School Safety Study. Phase II of this study will be conducted in 2001-02 and will provide a detailed discussion of students' views on school safety. The relationship between the views of staff and students on school safety will be highlighted. Additionally, links will be drawn between incidents of violence and school based programs, policies, and practices designed to prevent or reduce these incidents. Integrating the two phases of the study in this way will lead to policy recommendations for school safety in Arizona public schools.